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Legislature sends important water protection plan to governor

LANSING –Legislation that would comprehensively protect Michigan’s waters was sent to the governor today, said Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores, who sponsored one of the bills.

“Michigan’s lakes and streams mean so much to us and our state’s well-being, whether for recreational or commercial uses,” Van Woerkom said. “With this legislation, we are protecting our state’s greatest natural resource for future generations while allowing Michigan’s economy to prosper.”

Senate Bills 850-852, 854 and 857 create new standards for water withdrawals and permit for water users to help them avoid damaging the environment. Van Woerkom’s bill, SB 852, would require people who withdraw large volumes of groundwater to register with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

The package would:

- Strengthen the prohibition against water diversion by requiring legislative oversight;
- Put in place a system to manage significant new water withdrawals that have the potential to impact our water and water-dependent natural resources;
- Implement an interim standard that will provide protections for key designated trout streams by defining critical zones around the streams;
- Develop an easy-to-use model to replace the interim standard that will allow a user to click on a map and determine if water use will cause an adverse impact;
- Establish a permitting program for water bottling operations. This will ensure waters used for this purpose do not affect Michigan’s natural resources;
- Authorize the creation of groups of water users to work with the DEQ in crafting water plans that resolve water use problems before adverse impacts occur; and
- Require businesses that use our water to propose water use conservation measures.

(More)

The Great Lakes Task Force examined Michigan's water resources and issued its final report in 2002. The report noted, "The Great Lakes define the state of Michigan and its people. We live, work, and recreate on and around the lakes, and the care and safeguarding of this critical natural resource has been an ongoing responsibility for all the citizens of the state."

In December, the governor signed legislation sponsored by Van Woerkom that expanded the money available to municipalities to make water-quality improvements. Because of the senator's legislation, municipalities would have access to more money through loans and grants to pay for sewage treatment projects.

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